

god killer

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Summary

"Will, you are only a man," his father protests. "You cannot kill gods."

In answer, Will merely smiles, and hears Hannibal purring in his head. "Watch me."

Chapter 1

Will stands, watching the ever-shifting ocean that sits in a grand arch above his head. Hannibal's hearth burns brightly, warming him, his iron-clad heart beating slow and steady. He watches, his spear gripped in his hand, his breathing slow. Above him, a family of anglerfish circle, three adults and a little cluster of younglings. A large ray idly flaps her way across the ceiling, only visible because the light from Hannibal's hearth illuminates her soft, white underbelly, her smiling mouth.

He grips his spear, and hefts it. Despite it being made of bone, and rock, and the tooth of his god, it is light as a feather in his grip, perfectly balanced. It exists for only one purpose – to kill. He widens his stance, grips it tight just past the strings of his own hair, flexes his fingers.

He lifts it, slides his hand down farther so it's past the middle, and takes aim. Throws, at a sharp upward angle, with a grunt of effort, and watches it fling upwards, into the water with a little 'plop' and a small fall of ocean water as the seal breaks. He watches the ray dart away in alarm, her tail lashing out behind her. Watches the angle of refraction change its course, and watches the tip of it embed itself in the belly of one of the adult anglerfish.

The thing spasms, dark blood pooling around its wound. It stutters and dies, abandoned by its family, and Will lifts his hand as the spear returns to him, falling down in a perfect upright angle, the fish speared on the savage length of his god's tooth.

He smiles, and cups the fish' gaping jaw, kissing the place on its forehead where its spongey light juts. "Thank you," he murmurs, removing the spear.

The fish is large and flops without the density of the water to help it maintain its shape. Will strips it of its fangs, to make into other weapons, descales it and chews absently on the meat around its ribs. The rest, he throws onto the fire, sending up another prayer and word of thanks to his wonderful god, who saw fit to make the seas so wide and bountiful.

The god who, at a word from Will, appears at his side, large hands warm and flat on his flanks. Will smiles, turning his head so he can kiss Hannibal's hair as Hannibal nuzzles his shoulder, slides his hands down to grip Will's hips.

"My love," he murmurs. "What are you doing?"

"Practicing," Will replies, and sets the staff on its end, so Hannibal can see the gleaming blood and shiny organ matter clinging to the tip of his tooth. "I intend to shoot the dragon out of the sky."

It has been months since Will made his vow, since he was given the gift of this mighty weapon. The god-killing blade rests in his nest, as well; another promise, another tool he will use when the time comes. Hannibal blinks, and turns Will in place, cupping his chin and releasing a soft, adoring sigh.

"My beautiful boy," he murmurs. "You enthrall me."

Will smiles, and wonders how that can still be true. He has given Hannibal everything; his life, his blood, his tender and empty body. He cannot fathom how much Hannibal loves him, how he has always loved him, in his violent and terrible power. He throws his spear against his nest, clinging to Hannibal's shoulders and kissing him, a soft moan escaping his empty chest as Hannibal's arms wrap around him and pull him close.

"I love you," he breathes, watching as Hannibal's eyes flicker, the normal brown-red of his iris coloring a rich gold for a moment. The golden-eyed head, the part of him that symbolizes his lust for riches and wealth, sees Will as his most valued treasure, and echoes loudest when Will speaks of love. Will's hands cup his nape, slide into his hair, and he kisses again, hungry for things only his god has ever been able to satisfy.

Hannibal takes him by the hips, leads him to his throne, and sits atop it, letting Will prowl to him and straddle his thighs. His cock, thick and blushing red, grows hard between Will's legs, and Will reaches down so he can stroke it, his mouth flooded with saliva, his body aching around its own emptiness. There was a time when taking Hannibal hurt him, no matter how much he wanted it, but he is always so open and slick now, dripping for his god like rainwater from the mountains, that will pool in rivers and lakes, and feed the oceans.

"I'll kill them all," he promises, and Hannibal's upper lip twitches back, red coloring his iris, his hands wide on Will's hips as Will lifts to his knees, angles Hannibal's cock, and sinks down onto it. He moans as he's filled, gasping, trembling around him, his hands lifting to the high back of the throne and gripping tight. "The dragon, the wolf, the scorpion, and the mare. For you."

"Will," Hannibal gasps, clenching his jaw, tilting his head up as Will leans down, kissing him passionately as he works himself hard on his god's cock. Hannibal fills him up wonderfully, changes his human form so that he's huge and thick inside of Will, making his hips feel splintered and raw with the effort to part for him. Hannibal has venom on his tongue and Will sucks on it, drinks him down, whimpering when the familiar surge of ecstasy floods him like river water from a burst dam.

"Oh, Hannibal," Will whispers, cupping his face, clenching with every muscle he can to give his god pleasure. "Please, fill me. I am so empty, I ache."

Hannibal growls, showing his teeth, and Will lifts his lip further and licks into the hollow where he took Hannibal's fang. Hannibal's claws are sharp in his hips, bruising and shedding his blood, and Will shivers, weak-limbed and desperate, no thought in him but Hannibal's pleasure. He can feel it, roaring as though in his own head, Hannibal's threefold voices alight and snarling, all wishing for a taste of him.

"Plant yourself," he begs, kissing the words to Hannibal's open mouth. "Flood me. Drown my soul with you. *Please*."

"You are insatiable, my beloved boy," Hannibal replies, and Will smiles, breathless and shaking. He clings to Hannibal's shoulders, digging in with his nails, delighted by the way Hannibal's powerful body yields to him. He can hurt his god, do grievous harm with weapons and teeth, but he never would, and Hannibal knows this. What a wonderful gift it is; Hannibal's trust, his love, floods Will with fire. "Always hungry, so easily overwhelmed."

He flattens his hands on Will's thighs, pushes him down so all of Hannibal is buried inside him. Will groans, tipping his head back, panting weakly up at the beautiful surge of the excited ocean above them. Hannibal's tides churn and gather for him, on the precipice of breaking. Hannibal leans forward and licks Will's sternum, bites at his ribs with the golden-eyed head's fangs, and Will moans as his heart is pierced, and seized in the grip like a speared mouse in the jaws of a python. It flutters, stutters in place, and Will whimpers as Hannibal floods him, cock twitching and venom welling up in Will's mouth, dripping from his parted lips onto Hannibal's shoulder.

He gasps as he's released, Hannibal content to let Will's body keep his cock warm as he comes and fills Will's belly, and Will can only grind helplessly down onto him, every muscle and fiber of his being desperate to chase the arousal that sits heavy in his head like a weighted stone.

He buries his face in Hannibal's neck, trembling as he uses Hannibal's belly for friction, rocking onto the thick length still buried inside him, weeping with adoration as he feels Hannibal's seed spill from him. Hannibal is purring, a deep rumble of moving rock and devastating waves, a roar of thunderclouds. Will cups his neck and kisses his throat when he finishes, saltwater staining his cheeks which he rubs into Hannibal's skin.

"My love," Hannibal murmurs, gentle with concern. "Why do you weep?"

"I ache so deeply for you," Will confesses. "It overwhelms me."

"You have grown restless," Hannibal says. One hand flattens on Will's back, low, gently rubbing from side to side. "Your bloodlust has made you hungry."

"And yet, on the surface, I will be apart from you," Will replies.

Hannibal sighs. He does not like it any more than Will does, Will is certain. And yet -, "A necessary sacrifice," he says. "As all great power must require."

"Promise me," Will says, and lifts his head so their eyes can meet. "Promise me, when I return, that you will not let me move from our bed until the ocean has swallowed every inch of land there is."

Hannibal smiles, brilliant with joy, purple in his iris, and kissing Will to seal their bargain.

The land of the dragon is high in the mountains, the earth warm beneath his feet. There are no trees, save for scattered blackened stumps. It is all rock and ash and lava, and he is sweating, and it is hard to breathe. The world feels too heavy when not weightless within the ocean. He must use his spear for more than just a weapon; as a support as well, as he takes the long trek upwards.

Will has learned, in his months under Hannibal's care. He is not an idle, thoughtless bloodhound, nor a simple weapon to point and aim. Yes, if his god told him to strike down a man, any man, for any offense as trivial as breathing, he would, but when it comes to gods, one must be very careful, and very clever.

The dragon lives in the heart of a fiery mountain. The air is clogged with black and grey ash, and Will is blind with sweat. He is wearing thick hides of seals to protect his feet and legs from the scalding rock, but his chest is bare save for the necklace of teeth he wears around his throat. The god-killing blade hangs at his side, hidden beneath another skin and out of sight. His staff keeps him upright, bright and bleached as bone amidst the black rock.

He approaches the dragon's altar, which is a cluster of sharp-jutting stone, and falls to his knees in front of it. "Lord of the skies," he calls. "Master of fire and blood, hear me."

He takes a tooth from his necklace and drives it through his palm, wincing at the pain, smearing his offering upon the altar. Gods are helpless to resist the call of blood, and Will's blood, shining with mercury and silver and iron, is an irresistible offering.

He doesn't have to wait long. Within moments, the mountain rumbles beneath his aching body, and a spew of fresh ash comes from the mountain, a lazy trickle of lava like a licking tongue. Will is glad his god removed his lungs, for otherwise he would surely suffocate and die, were he a mortal man.

The dragon is beautiful, in his monstrous way. His scales shine as fresh blood, a mesmerizing shade of red that glows in the light of his golden eyes. His form is larger than Hannibal's, and his wings are huge enough to block out any weak attempts from the sun. Will shivers under the shadow of them, watching with awe as the dragon emerges from his mountain and peers at him with a tilted head, his eye like a beam of light that illuminates a circle around Will's body.

The dragon hums, and bares his teeth, and from his great maw drips bubbling acid, that spills and burns upon contact with the ground. Will remains on his knees, his head bowed, hair dripping with sweat.

"You are not one of mine," the dragon says. Will presses his lips together, and wonders if the dragon can smell Hannibal's venom on him. "You stink of the ocean, and have not seen the sun for some time, pale little lamb."

"Hannibal is my master," Will replies. "I come from one of his tribes."

The dragon's nostrils flare, another thick plume of smoke added to the clouds above. He lowers his head from his mountain entrance, and Will lifts his eyes, wary of coming so close to his mouth. Hannibal summons in him no fear, and truthfully, the dragon does not either, for Will is strong and capable and knows even in death he will not die. Still, he does not want to be eaten.

"Stand," the dragon commands, and Will pushes himself to his feet. His head tilts again, blinking one brilliant golden eye at Will. His eyes are not like Hannibal's, they do not shift like ocean tides, but shine on him like sunlight on a hoard of treasure, unyielding gold. The

slit in his eye expands, so Will can see his entire self within it. "How does one who serves the ocean find himself so far from it?"

"I come to beg an audience with you," Will replies. "It was not so long ago that you and my master were friends, that you used his storms to fight the titans, and he swallowed them when you threw them into his domain."

The dragon huffs, and shows his teeth in a wide coyote smile. "Yes," he replies, eye blinking with a loud, sharp click. "A good time it was. Very well." He straightens, apparently less interested in eating Will for the moment, and stares down at Will along his sharp, wide maw. "You have your audience. Speak, little lamb."

"I intend to kill the scorpion queen," Will says. The dragon blinks at him. "I would ask for your help. Her land is far away, and in the desert, so my master cannot go there."

The dragon's nostrils flare, and he tilts his head. More of him emerges, his neck giving way to thick, broad shoulders, a belly of scales that are white and black and embedded with various trinkets that have found places in the hollows between them. His claws, black and long as Hannibal's teeth, curl around the entrance to his cave. Will imagines him sitting upright, tail twitching like a curious cat, watching the mice play before he devours them.

Will bows his head, for while he does not serve this beast, he is a god, and deserves respect. "Let me ride upon your back, my lord, and bring me to her lair. My master offers you her land, rich with fire, in payment, and all her worshippers with it."

The dragon laughs, a deep rumble that sounds like shifting rock. "And how do you propose you will kill the queen, little lamb? You are so small and pale, you could not possibly harm her, even if I did deign to bring you."

Will smiles. "Then I suppose I will die," he replies.

The dragon blinks at him, another click of his reptilian lids. "There is some strange enchantment about you, little lamb," he says curiously, nostrils flaring, belly growing warm and brilliant with his fire. Will swallows, allowing the dragon to see his fear, see himself fight to overcome it and refuse to take a step back. "The ocean god is normally so quiet and alone. What did you do, to earn his favor?"

Will cannot help but smile again, so alight with love, his entire body shivering with it. "I called him beautiful."

The dragon laughs. "A wonderful thing, flattery," he replies, and arches his head, graceful and noble and terrible. "And me? Do you think me lovely to look at, as well?"

Will nods. "In truth, my Lord, you are," he replies, and that is not a lie. "It is why I came to you – you are my master's friend, but I wished to gaze upon your magnificence. Even if you desire more to eat me than to help me, I will die happy, knowing that I have seen true power."

The dragon lets out a curious sound, and blows out another heavy plume of smoke, encasing Will. He does not cough, but winces, eyes watering at the sting of it. He covers his mouth so

he does not taste the dragon's ash.

"You have a silver tongue and eyes like the sky," the dragon murmurs, like these things are marvels. He nods. "I will help you, little lamb. You may ride upon my back, and I will take you to the desert."

Will breathes out, weak with relief. "Thank you, my Lord. Can I offer anything as further payment for such a gift?"

At this, the dragon smiles. "Yes," he replies. "I have often coveted your master's throne. It is made of gold, and I desire it greatly. Bring it to my altar, and once you have, I will take you wherever you wish to go."

Will swallows. Hannibal will not like that, not at all. He bows his head, and the dragon hums, eyelids lowered, and retreats back into his mountain.

Will seeks refuge at the altar his tribe made for himself and Hannibal. He walks to it, flattening his hands over the marks left by his nails, the first and second time Hannibal mounted him in his true, bestial form. His body trembles with the memory, a deep and desperate ache burgeoning like the first clouds of a storm. He wants, so badly he feels blind with it, to touch the soft skin of his god, to feel Hannibal's hands and teeth on him, inside him. It is all he can do not to run to the top of the cliff and fling himself from its heights, back down into the ocean, to be with his love for just a moment.

"Will?"

His name is said as a shocked gasp, and Will turns, to see his father standing with an offering of wildflowers clutched in his arms. He smiles, bright with joy on seeing him, and his father goes to him, careful with the flowers, which he places around the altar, before he straightens and embraces Will, holding him tightly.

"My boy," he breathes, and Will clutches him back. He buries his face in his father's hair, which has grown thin and white since Will last saw him, and he wonders if his father ever appeared so small, so frail. He was a fierce warrior in his day, and then, after, taught Will to fish and hunt all the treasures of the ocean, but now Will is taller, and stronger, and holds metal in his veins.

They pull apart, and Will sees tears in his father's eyes. "Why do you weep?" he asks, and smiles, thumbing them from his cheek. "Am I not alive, and whole, and happy to see you?"

"I knew you were alive," his father replies. "The ocean told me, and it has been so bountiful since you were taken. I know, wherever you reside now, that our god is happy with us."

Will smiles, and gestures to the altar. "You bid them carve my name below his," he says, another surge of joy in him, clogging his throat, when he thinks of the first time Hannibal told

him. His father nods, eyes falling to the stone, now stained red and black by Will's blood. He flattens his hand upon it, and sighs heavily.

"I mourned you, for a time," he confesses. "Until I was told what had become of you. I cannot fathom what life must be like for you now."

"It is wonderful," Will replies. "I am never hungry, and never left wanting for anything. Our god is beautiful, and mighty, and I love him as fiercely as I have ever loved anything." Perhaps more; certainly, Will cannot imagine loving anyone or anything more than Hannibal. His god purrs in his head, brings him to ecstasy with just a touch, and gives Will everything he desires. Blood, and riches, and unending love.

His father smiles, glad to see Will so happy. "Why, then, are you here?"

"I have been given a task by our god, and must remain on the surface to see it carried out." He sighs, looking longingly up the mountain, where only a year ago he was brought, bound and led by a horse, destined to be devoured by the sea. "I sought solace at our altar, hoping it would make me feel close to him."

"And has it?"

"No," Will replies. "But that is no fault of anything. Even when an inch separates us, I ache."

His father nods, eyes bright with sympathy. "I felt the same for your mother," he replies, and Will looks to him. "The only thing that gave me any comfort, when she was not with me, was you."

Will swallows, throat going tight. "I fear I won't ever have that blessing," he says. He is not saddened by it, not in any specific and sharp way. He is a man, after all, and cannot bear children. Even if he did have the innards for it, Hannibal ripped it from him, and he would still be empty as a woman as he is now.

His father smiles. "Hannibal is a god, Will," he says kindly. "And did you not just tell me he gives you everything?" Will tilts his head, but nods, frowning in confusion. "If you asked him for a child -."

"Father," Will interrupts, low and hushed. "I would rather not speak of it. Please." He lifts his chin, breathes in the ocean air. Hannibal is close, in this place, and Will would never dare give any indication that he is left unsatisfied, or risk angering Hannibal at the implication that he is not enough. Will is happy, is broken with joy, and could never ask Hannibal for more, when he has already given so much.

He stiffens, feeling the great beast stirring in his head. *My love, you called for me?* Hannibal whispers to him. Will shivers, biting his lower lip, gripping his spear tightly at the surge of heat and pleasure that rings through him at the sound of Hannibal's voice.

I am by our altar, he replies. *My father is here.*

Ah, Hannibal says, with a flicker of amusement and fond affection. He fades away, content to leave Will to their reunion, and Will aches, whimpers behind his teeth. He wants to call his god back to him immediately, feels pale and feverish without him.

His father notices. "Do you still eat?" he asks, and Will lifts his shoulders in a shrug. Yes, he eats when the ocean provides, though he has no need to. There is a certain mortal pleasure in consuming warm meat. He smiles, and rests a hand on Will's shoulder. "Come. You will rest with me for the night, if you can spare the hours, before you continue on your journey."

"Thank you, father," Will replies, and goes with him to the village. Their house lies on the outskirts, for even in a tribe the Graham line has always been a rather removed pack, preferring the solitude of themselves over that of others. Their house is just as Will remembers, a thick seal skin hanging instead of a door, a pit in the center for warm fires, and a hole in the roof for smoke to escape. There is a barren spot where his bed used to be, but the sight of it doesn't sadden him. His father may have mourned him, but Will is not dead. It seems silly, then, to leave a shrine for him to be remembered by.

"I will fetch blankets," he says, and leaves, and Will sits in the place his bed used to be, carefully laying down his spear and the god-killing blade, and his necklace of teeth. He pulls the extra skin over his shoulders, and his father returns with three blankets. He lays one down and wraps himself in the other two.

His father lights a fire, until the little room is filled with warm orange light. Will thinks of the dragon, and shivers, leaning in to warm his hands. On the other side of the fire is where his father sleeps, and where his mother used to. Will remembers, when he was young, before his mother was sacrificed to the same god he loves so dearly, lying awake and listening to them making love, or lost in quiet conversation with each other. His mother was an intelligent woman, a fierce and proud woman, and taught Will how to find beauty in even the most evil-looking things.

It is to her, Will thinks, that he owes thanks, for when Hannibal rose from the depths of the sea to devour him whole, all he could think was how beautiful his god was, and how blessed Will was to be chosen to sate his hunger.

From a small bag near the fire, his father pulls out dried and salted strips of fish, handing some to Will and taking more for himself. They eat in silence, which they often have. Will has never needed conversation to enjoy companionship.

After a while, his father clears his throat. "I hope you'll forgive me, my boy, for I am an old man and still worry for my only son. May I ask what our god has tasked you with?"

Will smiles. "I'm going to kill the other gods," he replies.

His father blinks at him. "You're...*how*?" he demands.

Will rests his hand upon his weapons.

"Why?" he asks again.

"Because I want to," Will replies with a shrug. "They have caused grievous offence to my god, my love and my master. I would see them suffer for that. The world owes their love and loyalty to Hannibal. He is the water god, after all, and from him all life comes forth. Without him, the wolf would not have his forests, nor the mare her pastures, nor the dragon and scorpion their worshippers." He lowers his eyes, glaring darkly at the fire. Suddenly, its presence offends him. "They are greedy. If they will not bow, then I will break them."

"Will, you are only a man," his father protests. "You cannot kill gods."

In answer, Will merely smiles, and hears Hannibal purring in his head. "Watch me."

Chapter 2

Will waits until the moon is high and his father is asleep. She is a thick curve in the sky, glowing like a white halo through the gap in the roof, and smiles down on him as he lifts his head and looks to her. Hannibal likes to come up to the surface when the moon is full, and she is nearing that point now. Storm clouds linger around her, wreathing her like a silver lion's mane. Hannibal loves the moon so dearly, and would never cloud her sight if he can help it.

Will rises, gathering his weapons. He is not used to sleeping during the night, for the night is when Hannibal comes to him, lays him down on rich silks, warm blankets, soft hides, and floods him with venom and love. Will's body knows the tides, feels them like the rocking beat of his own heart, and he is alive and alight with energy when he feels the moon pinch his cheek like a loving mother.

He kneels by his father's snoring body, kisses his fingers and places them upon his father's brow. "Be blessed, and content," he whispers, and wonders if it's foolish to ask for such a thing. Hannibal is his love, his master, and though he has never mentioned Will's mortal life, and Will has never asked, he feels some implicit promise between them, that Will's father and his tribe will remain safe and happy for as long as Hannibal resides in the water.

That thought weighs heavy on him; there may be a time, one day, when he will be gone. Even gods die, and they must all submit to that inevitable slumber eventually. He does not know if he is still aging, for the year has passed swiftly and he looks and feels no different, but there may be a time, one day, when hair grows thick on his face and turns grey on his head. When his skin begins to sag and grow pale, showing his veins. There may be a time when his joints ache, and he cannot stand, cannot walk. He may lose his teeth, or his ability to speak. He may, one day, become unable to use his hands because his knuckles are so stiff.

If that happens, he doesn't want Hannibal to be alone. He will be, if Will kills all the other gods but fails to resurrect his sister. He will be, if Will fails in this mission, for none of the gods will forgive him for an attempt on their lives.

These thoughts cloud and darken his disposition, and he curls his fingers around his necklace of teeth, tugging absently to feel the burn on the nape of his neck of string, and the bite of fangs into his palm. He walks to the altar and rests his hands upon it, his staff by his side, his god-killing blade hanging from his belt.

Blood is a powerful summoner, and his blood upon his own altar undoubtedly calls Hannibal's attention. Mere moments later, Will hears the familiar gush and splatter of a great amount of water being displaced, the groan of the mountain and the cliff crushed beneath Hannibal's mighty bestial form. He looks up, to see his god's center head blocking out the moon, and weeps with joy when Hannibal smiles at him, and descends from the mountain.

"My love," Hannibal purrs to him, leaning down with his center head, which Will takes in his hands and kisses, closing his eyes and resting his forehead against Hannibal's muzzle.

Hannibal's nostrils flare, the tongue of the golden-eyed head snakes out to wrap around Will's arm. In his head, Will hears the other two voices; *Hello, beautiful boy. Hello, my Will.*

He laughs, though the sound holds more hysteria than joy. "Can it have only been a week since I touched you last?" he whispers, his hands sliding along the velvet softness of Hannibal's lower lip, to the corner of his jaw. He turns to give the golden-eyed head a kiss, and then again, for the red-eyed one with its mane of tentacles. The red-eyed head slow-blinks at him like a cat, and purrs, venom dripping from its muzzle.

"I have ached for you," Hannibal tells him. "My hearth feels cold without you there, my rooms too large and utterly barren." His jaws part, allowing Will to pet over his tongue, as he did all those moons ago when he laid upon the first altar and called his god 'beautiful'.

"Did you come to warm yourself inside me?" Will asks, already breathless, steel-lined heart racing in anticipation.

Hannibal's exhale is warm, and comes with a snarl. "I would wish for nothing else, my love," he says, "but you cannot smell of me when you hunt the wolf, nor the mare. They have sharp senses, and will smell you coming."

"Then take my skin when you're finished with me," Will replies, unable to stop the petulant note coloring his voice.

Hannibal laughs, his amusement like honey sliding down Will's throat. "Your hunger flatters me, my beautiful boy, but I must merely answer it with patience. You are young, and have much time to master it."

Will nods, and swallows back his questions about how long, precisely, that time may stretch for. Thought of his own mortality have never troubled him before, and he finds their presence now inconvenient and unwelcome. Of course, Hannibal notices, and the angular muzzle of the golden-eyed head nudges Will's cheek in askance.

"Something heavy plagues your mind, my love," Hannibal whispers to him.

Will swallows. "I spoke with the dragon," he murmurs, and Hannibal gives a huff of agreement - he can likely smell the ash clinging to Will's skin, sitting in crevices beneath his arms and under his nails. "He said he would take me to the land of the scorpion queen...." He sighs, and pulls back. "In exchange for your throne."

He expects Hannibal's quiet rumble of displeasure, a whip of his tail, an upward curl of his lips to reveal his mighty teeth. What he did not expect was to hear Hannibal's laughter. He blinks up at his god, finds the eyes of the purple head fixed far in the West, where the dragon lies.

"He has wanted that for a long time," Hannibal murmurs.

Will frowns up at him, and places a hand upon his foreleg, over the mark from Will's teeth. "You're not going to give it to him, are you?" he asks, unable to hide his disbelief.

"If that's what he wants, then it is a small price," Hannibal replies, and fixes Will with a bright-glowing eye. "Thrones are made for kings to sit in, so their worshippers might know where to aim their bows. The only place I share my home with is you, and you require no guidance."

"But it's your throne," Will protests. "Surely there is some power in it that you should want to keep."

Hannibal laughs again. "Perhaps the dragon believes there is," he replies, and gives Will a warm smile, a gentle brush of affection between their mental link. "The truth is that it is made of gold, and therefore he wants it. It is all dragons ever want." His head for riches tilts, golden eyes flashing, long tongue flicking out like a snake to taste Will's skin. "I think...if I did not have you, I would be more loathe to part with it. But all the treasures in the world, all the gold, the riches.... I am finding that, ultimately, it means nothing."

Will can't speak, can barely breathe. All he can do is tighten his hand on Hannibal's foreleg and hope Hannibal feels, in Will's mind, in his heart, how desperately and wholly Will loves him. To be compared to something as magnificent, timeless, and grand as Hannibal's lust for riches is staggering. To win that contest seems impossible.

The golden-eyed head nudges him, and Will turns, smiling when his cheeks are licked clean of tears.

"My lord," Will manages, weak and breathless and laughing at himself for having it affect him so; "It's cruel of you to say such things when I know you will not touch me."

"Just as it is cruel of you, dear boy, to summon me to the land when I can do nothing but be with you," Hannibal replies. Will huffs, supposing that is true. And is Hannibal not a cruel, relentless, unforgiving god? Will has seen the gentle side of his nature, but just like the many heads he has, Hannibal is not simply one thing.

He sighs, rubbing a hand through his hair. "I'm sorry for tempting you, my love," he murmurs, heavy with sorrow. "I just miss you so much. I feel empty. I ache."

"As I ache for you, darling," Hannibal replies. "It will not be long. I will go and bring my throne to the land. Journey to the dragon, and tell him he may have his prize."

Will nods, releasing Hannibal's head with another plaintive sigh. "I love you," he whispers.

Hannibal smiles at him, and his purr rumbles threefold in Will's head. "And I love and adore you, my beautiful ocean-eyed boy. Go, and I will see you when your task is done."

Hannibal brings the throne to the water's edge near the dragon's mountain. It is there by the time Will arrives, his journey much slower on foot. A pang resounds in his chest when he sees the beautiful golden monument, drenched with seawater. He supposes, once the dragon

is killed, that he will be able to take it back. He would miss being able to serve his god at his throne. Taking Hannibal inside him with the gleam of it under the ocean waves is one of his favorite things, and he would never go without it if he can help it.

He walks to the dragon's altar and places his bloody hand upon the rock. "Lord and master of fire and stone," he calls. "Hear me."

The dragon emerges in a cloud of ash, blinking one large golden eye down at Will. He smiles. "Have you brought me my prize, little lamb?"

Will nods. "It sits upon the beach. Forgive me; I am too weak to carry it up here myself."

The dragon laughs. "Yes, you are weak," he purrs. "And so small. Are you still set in your quest to murder the scorpion queen?"

"I am."

The dragon hums. "Then come closer, little lamb, and climb upon my back." Will nods, his skin slick with sweat from the heat of the volcano as he ascends further, and steps into the dragon's lowered hand. His claws are bone-white and sharp, and curl around Will, lifting him so that Will can climb onto his shoulder and settle between two sharp, long-jutting spines.

The dragon heaves from his mountain, spilling fresh fire and ash into the sky, and Will winces, glad that he has no lungs and needs no air, lest he choke. Still, he covers his mouth, for he doesn't want to taste the dragon on his tongue. He aches for water, for life-giving rains. There is no such thing in this place.

The dragon's wings spread out wide, crusted with volcanic rock that easily breaks under his powerful stretch. He arches his neck and shakes off the rest of the dust gathered in his scales, and shoves from the mountain with a mighty surge, every inch of powerful muscle coiled and releasing to fling them into the sky.

Will gasps, eyes widening with awe when he sees the land disappear beneath him. He clings to the spine in front of him, keeping his other hand tight on his spear so it doesn't fall. The mountains stretch much farther back than he imagined, rivers of lava and smoking rock creating clouds and acid, poisonous rain.

The dragon turns, towards a stretch of land that is a pale yellow. The desert. The wind whips cruelly at his hair and bare skin, causing him to shiver, but the dragon is warm between his thighs, his fire heating Will and making his clothes legs and feet sweat.

The flight is swift, for all the time it would have taken Will on foot. A week's journey passes in merely an hour, as the dragon flares his wings and begins a slow descent, a wide circle above a small oasis in the middle of the desert. They touch down a few miles from it, and Will pants in the heat, wiping sweat from his brow.

He dismounts, and bows his head, lowering himself to kneel upon the sand. "Thank you, my Lord," he murmurs. "My master will see you rewarded for this favor."

The dragon hums, snapping his teeth together. "I hope you are victorious, little lamb," he replies. "It has been a long time since I tasted fresh blood."

With that, he flares out his wings and pushes up, creating a gale of sand around Will's body as he takes to the skies. Will coughs, wincing, his throat dry and aching for water, his stomach tense, desperate for the nourishment that the sea can give. Still, he is set on his purpose, and cannot turn back now. There is no water for miles around, except in that oasis.

Above him, a hawk screeches, and below his feet, the sand shifts and moves, and a scorpion rises from the yellow sand, shaking itself free and curling its tail up in threat.

Will smiles at it. "I have come to see your mother," he murmurs.

The scorpion eyes him, and clicks its claws, before it turns away, scuttling quickly along the sand, towards the oasis. Will follows.

The scorpion queen's lair is much like he imagined it; a single cave, half-buried in the sand, surrounded by tall trees with only a few branches far up, splayed out with delicate fronds like seaweed. There is a breeze, light and unsatisfying though it is. There is a pool of water in front of the cave, shallow and crystal clear; a lovely color, and it makes Will's dry mouth feel like rock.

Still, he does not go to it. There is an altar in the middle of the pool.

He kneels in front of it, and cups his hands around his mouth. "Mother of poison and mistress of the sand, hear me. I have come to pay homage. I pray you, let me drink of your fountain."

For a moment, there is only stillness, and then a stirring at the mouth of the cave. The scorpion queen is beautiful, tall and willow-like, her hair the same golden color as the sand around her lair. There is a lovely swirl of scales across her belly, over her breasts, between her thighs, hinting at modesty. She has the face of a queen and the bearing of a goddess, and Will falls further to the ground, his head bowed in respect, as she comes to a halt at the other end of her pool and fixes him with a curious eye.

"A traveler?" she murmurs, slow-spoken. Will nods, and lifts his gaze to her as she lifts her chin, breathing in. Her eyes rake down him, and she arches a brow. "You have the scent of ash on you, young man. Where do you hail from?"

"I was once loyal to the god of the seas," Will replies. "And then, the dragon. And now I have come to you."

"Is that so?" she murmurs, taking a step closer. "So you are a fickle follower. Why should I lend my ear? Why should I let you drink?"

"My Lady, I am parched. I have heard tales of your gifts, your benevolence, and your beauty. I wished to gaze upon you, and see if they were true." He smiles. "They are. You are the most

beautiful goddess I have ever seen."

She laughs. "You're a flattering one," she muses. "I can see why the gods have been so easily charmed, but it takes more than pretty words to sway me."

"What, then, can I offer you, my Lady?" Will asks.

She hums, and steps up to him, walking across the surface of the water like she is made of air, until she comes to a stop in front of Will. She reaches down, cupping his cheek, her nails purple and long, sharp enough to sting at his wind-chapped skin.

"It has been a long while since I've had visitors," she says slowly, tilting her head, her long hair falling in shimmering waves down her back like a waterfall. Ironical, he thinks, given her domain. "Longer still since I have had children. You are young, and strong." Her eyes dip down him again, lashes lowering as she hums. "You think I am beautiful?"

"Truly, there is no one your equal of this earth," Will replies. And that is not untrue. Hannibal is not of the earth. He flushes, and forces a sheepish, humble laugh. "You conjure a young boy's reaction in me, forgive me; I think I would be happy on my knees for you forever."

She blinks, at that. Her eyes are the same clear crystal blue of her pool. She smiles, genteel and gracious. "You may drink, sweet boy," she purrs, and releases his chin. "Then, come to the cave, and I will take your young boy's reaction for myself."

Will sucks in a breath, and nods. "Thank you, my Lady. Thank you."

She smiles at him, and disappears into her cave. Will does not drink; he knows better. He cannot trust the gifts of the scorpion queen. He rises after a moment, dips his hand in the water and wets his mouth with it, so it appears as though he has drunk, and circles the pool with careful steps, sighing in relief when he enters the welcoming coolness of the cave.

Inside, there is a nest much like his own within Hannibal's home, adorned with gossamer and pink silk. She stands beside it, and beckons him forward, pulling him into a kiss that makes Will shiver and moan. He forces himself to react, though his mind remains on Hannibal, and it is the only reason that, when she reaches down and grabs him through his clothes, he has an erection to tease her with.

She wraps a hand in his hair and kisses him again, venom on her tongue that tastes sweet, and gives Will the same surge of ecstasy Hannibal does. His moan is slightly more genuine, this time, as she pulls him to the nest and lies back upon it, spreading her thighs to reveal that, despite her scales, she is slick and open like a mortal.

Will smiles, and steps up, kneeling between her legs. He leans down to kiss her, fumbles at his clothes like an inexperienced youth, and it makes her laugh. Then, he reaches below his seal skin, and grabs the god-killing blade.

He slits her throat before she can react and rises from her nest as she chokes, wide-eyed, staring up at him in shock. He wipes her blood from the blade and returns it to his side, swallowing back his riotous guilt when he can still taste her kiss upon his mouth.

She reaches out to him, pointing with one accusing finger, but he cut so deep that she cannot speak. She cannot command her children to hurt him.

He leaves the cave, wincing in the bright sunlight, and wades into the center of the pool. He is strong enough to claw at the altar, carving Hannibal's name, and splits his palms on his necklace of teeth so that his god can hear him.

"My love," he whispers. "Drown this place. Bring your rains, and devour the queen and all her disciples that will not pray to you." Around his legs, the water stirs, and begins to bubble, flooding from an unknown source, and rising. Above him, the clouds darken.

Will swallows. "Hannibal, forgive me," he adds, kneeling down as the water rises to his chest, spilling out in thick waves, ready to drench the desert under his domain. From the fast-growing edges, scorpion children flee in droves. They will not outrun the rain. "Please, forgive me, for what I've done."

What have you done, Will? Hannibal asks.

"I let her kiss me," Will replies. Above him, the storm clouds snarl in anger. "I told her half-truths and called her beautiful. I have betrayed you."

The ground shakes beneath him, and Will rises to his feet, gasping as the water rushes up to his neck and he suddenly feels so heavy, as though being pulled out to drown. From the pool, Hannibal's great heads rise, snarling in displeasure, eyes glowing with rage.

He grabs Will in one giant hand and brings him close enough that Will's head is at risk of being snapped off by his teeth. "Did she touch you?" he demands.

"Three kisses, my lord," Will replies, trembling with fear, for he knows even a kiss is a betrayal. His body has only ever known Hannibal. He curls his fingers, flushed and shaking. "Her poison, I feel it inside me. I tasted it on her tongue."

"Oh, Will," Hannibal growls. "If I did not love you so dearly, I would destroy you this instant."

Will nods. He would deserve it.

"As it stands, you did what was needed to be victorious," Hannibal continues. "I suppose it is selfish of me to only demand things of you, and not suffer some as a result of your quest." Will gasps, his eyes wide as Hannibal pulls back, so their gazes can meet. "You will not be so foolish with the others."

"No, Hannibal, I promise," Will vows. "I would sooner end my own life."

"Rest assured, dear boy, I would end it for you," Hannibal replies coolly. Will cannot help it – he laughs. "Does that amuse you?"

"I just...." He gives a helpless shrug. "I just love you so much."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, and raises his eyes to the sky. "The rains will fall," he murmurs. Will nods; he can feel it, feel the great swells of the ocean, the gathering of rains, the relentless downpour where it has already begun over the villages in the desert.

Hannibal sighs, and sets him down. "The dragon must be next," he says. "He will come to claim what you promised him. Come; I will take you to the throne. You will strike him down there."

"As you wish," Will replies, and climbs into Hannibal's mouth with a smile, sighing in relief as Hannibal's teeth close around him, and they disappear into the pool together as the tides sweep out to cover the desert in its entirety.

Chapter 3

Will sits, silent as a grave, his skin cold and raising in goose flesh against the gold throne that has made up his perch. No matter how long he sits here, the metal refuses to warm. It trembles with the movement of the oceans, the little waves that lap at the feet of it, making it shine brilliantly in the sunlight.

He watches, his spear gripped in his hand, his breathing slow. Above him, a family of starlings and their cousins, the white gulls, caw and cry at each other as they search for fish. A shrike spears a crab to his left and takes it to his cactus nest to show to his future mate.

Behind him, Will feels the eyes of the ocean. If he were to look back and gaze into the hollow maw of a cresting wave, he would see eyes glowing back at him. Purple and gold and red. He shivers, biting his lower lip, and rubs his hand over his fingers, frozen stiff around the part of his spear where his own hair has set into lines like salt on driftwood.

He lifts his gaze. There are clouds, ash spewing from mountains far, far away. The dragon likes to fly in the darkness, it is said.

He hears a rumble, and every muscle in his body tenses with anticipation.

Soon, my darling boy, Hannibal purrs inside his head. He is wrath and power and riches. He makes Will's palms sweat and his eyes grow hazy. His chest, empty save for his iron-clad heart, rusts in the salt air. He is not made for the surface anymore; he hates it. He hates whatever does not feel like the weight of the ocean. He was made to be wet and open and the cling of gravity's claws, the brilliance of the sun, makes him ache down to what remains of his bones.

He grips his spear, and hefts it. Despite it being made of bone, and rock, and the tooth of his god, it is light as a feather in his grip, perfectly balanced. It exists for only one purpose – to kill. He widens his stance, toes curling around the edge of the seat of Hannibal's throne. He can see, in the clouds, the glint of red scales and bright eyes.

He grips his spear tight just past the strings of his own hair, flexes his fingers.

The clouds part and give him a teasing slip of tail, as coy as the brazen flash of a virgin's thigh, a tittering amongst the gulls as they fling themselves away from the dragon's path, crying in anticipation. Above him, the storm clouds from the desert have reached them, and Will gasps as he is, quickly and with such bitter chill, soaked through with rain.

He moans. Hannibal is in the rain, and every drop is a caress from his god, a kiss, a lick between his thighs, between his lips. A hand in his hair and teeth in his arm, weight pinning him down. It takes all his might to remain on his feet, to lift his head and shiver with desire, feeling, behind him, the ocean snarl and the waves rise higher as Hannibal answers him in kind.

He lifts his spear, slides his hand down farther so it's past the middle, and takes aim. Throws, at a sharp upward angle, with a grunt of effort, and watches it fling upwards. He throws it so hard he stumbles from the throne, to his hands and knees in the gritty, silty sand.

He lifts his head as he hears a roar of pain, and the rain turns red and the stink of blood grows thick. A fireball holding the dragon falls from the sky. Will's aim was true; it pierced straight through a gap in his scales, into his chest, piercing his heart.

He smiles, watching as the dragon screams, his bright eyes finding Will in front of his god's throne. His eyes narrow and his wings flare, crashing to the ground with a spray of sand so violent that it strikes Will across the face, bloodying his cheeks, his forehead, his arms.

"Traitor!" the dragon shrieks, tail thrashing. His chest glows with his fire, and it builds up to the back of his open maw, but Will's spear is lodged in his neck and he cannot create the right amount of pressure to spew it at Will.

Besides, there is so much rain, Will does not fear being burned.

He laughs, right in the beast's face. "Who have I betrayed?" he challenges. "I am not loyal to you."

The dragon roars, and since he cannot fly, and cannot breathe fire, he lunges for Will, savage teeth bared to spear him, claws unsheathed to rip him to shreds. Will rises, and takes out the god killing blade, sweeping in a vicious arc to keep the beast back.

And then, with a roar that would break the earth apart at the very foundations, Hannibal emerges from his ocean home. His red-eyed head with its mane of tentacles finds the dragon's throat first, muzzle wrinkled in a savage snarl as the golden-eyed head darts in and yanks Will's spear out, throwing it towards him. With the wound now open, blood and fire gushes in thick spurts. The dragon howls in pain, baring his teeth, and Hannibal meets him. He is smaller, but with three heads and without grievous wounds, and in his element, he is stronger.

He is so beautiful Will could weep.

Hannibal's center head finds the back of the dragon's skull, clamps down and rips, tearing the beast's head almost clean off. The dragon's body spasms, wings twitching in death throes and curling up like a dead spider. Will watches the dragon die, with one baleful eye still fixed his way. Black venom and ash spill from the dragon's neck and chest and open mouth.

His attention is drawn as Hannibal snarls, heads tossing in victory, every inch of him coiled up and tense like a cat ready to lunge. Will falls to his knees, dropping both blade and spear, bows his head as Hannibal slithers over the sand to him and takes him in one large clawed hand.

Will is brought to the center head, and he closes his eyes and moans as a tongue licks over his chest, agile enough to sink beneath his clothes, between his legs, and push itself inside him. He clutches at Hannibal's muzzle, his hands growing black with the dragon's blood, and whimpers as he's penetrated, forced open and held so tightly in Hannibal's claws all he can do is twitch and whine.

That same emptiness, that cavernous need, rears up in him, and he rubs his cheek against Hannibal's bared fangs and jerks in his grip. "Please," he cries, panting, soaked through with the rain that is still pouring, the water rising, set to sweep in and flood the grasslands and the forests until even the volcano is buried in the ocean.

Hannibal licks him to orgasm, Will screaming loud enough to rival the thunder above them, and then Hannibal snarls, tongue withdrawing, and throws him down onto his belly on the sand. He's by the throne, and he only manages to climb it before Hannibal is on him, pushing it backwards so Will has his knees perched on the topside, bent over the seat, his hands around the top of the back rest and fingers dug deep into the wet sand.

Hannibal's front legs frame him, digging in on either side, and the red-eyed head's tentacles worm his clothes down to his thighs, wrap around his legs to keep him still and spread open, and Hannibal snarls, grunts, and forces his giant cock into Will's body.

Will weeps openly, utterly overwhelmed at the fierce, savage snarl echoing threefold in his head. Hannibal's presence feels different, somehow; drunk on victory. He's rougher than he has been, fucks Will until Will's collarbones bulge and threaten to snap around the very head of him, his heart pressed hard to the back of his ribs, his spine rutting harsh against Hannibal's belly. Will cannot help answer it in kind, with a snarl of his own, running his hands over the back of Hannibal's and lacing his fingers between the large beast's knuckles.

"Harder," he commands. Hannibal growls in agreement, shifts his weight, fucks into him hard enough that Will's knees open and bloody the throne. Will smiles, tastes blood and precum in his mouth, looks up when the golden-eyed head which is always so eager for his kisses nuzzles him and licks at his teeth. "You felt it, didn't you? Your power, wielded by my hand, brought the dragon down from the sky."

"Yes," Hannibal replies, sounding breathless. Beneath his broad body, Will doesn't feel the rain, but it's pooling around his hands and the water is rising up the flanks of the throne. Soon, he will be buried in it. The golden-eyed head blinks at him, frills around its ears turning pink with affection. It licks into Will's mouth and he moans, feels the tip of its tongue tease the back of his throat.

One of the tentacles wraps around Will's cock, stroking him past pleasure, into oversensitive and ravenous delight. He moans, shuddering with another orgasm, feels every muscle in his body clench for his master and shivers when Hannibal snarls in pleasure at the feeling.

"*Harder*," he demands, and Hannibal's tail lashes against the ground, sending a wide arc of water and sand around them. He pushes in deeper, until Will can taste him, until his mouth floods with precum and he's drooling onto the throne. The golden-eyed head licks at him, fangs bared, mouth open and panting.

Hannibal snarls, shifts his weight and grips Will's waist with one hand, holding him still as he lifts Will from the throne and uses him like a living doll, forcing Will down onto his cock until Will feels the opening of his scales against his rim. He cries out, petting his distended belly, brings his legs together to tighten himself up further and squeezes as hard as he can.

When Hannibal comes, it floods every inch of Will, and he swallows it before it can drip from his mouth, greedy to keep all of it inside. He wraps a hand around Hannibal's shaft to stop his come leaking out of him as Hannibal snarls, settling on his haunches, and slowly pulls Will off of him. Will, gaping and so wet and open, can't keep it all in, and he moans with loss when he's set back down on the throne, Hannibal correcting it so he can sit.

Hannibal moves away from him, just far enough that Will can feel the rain on his face and pooling in his lap. He gasps, tilting his head up, eyes fixed on his beautiful, wrathful, relentless god. Suddenly even the scant space between them feels like miles and eons.

Hannibal's tail wraps around the base of the throne, and his center head curls down to nuzzle and bluster against Will's hair, like he, too, cannot bear the distance. Will sighs, smiling, and pets over his lip. "Only two more," he says, throat so sore it comes out a rasp.

Hannibal purrs, in his head. "Yes," he replies in a whisper. His head tilts, as though listening to something. "The wolf is not as easily seduced as the others. The mare will be distraught after the death of her mate. You must tread carefully, my darling boy."

"I fear neither wolf nor horse," Will replies. "They are slaves to their need for water."

Hannibal laughs. "As all things are," he purrs. Will's smile widens. "Who, then, will you choose first, my love?"

"The mare, I think," Will replies in a hum, looking out to the mainland. Before him, pasture rises, and soon becomes woodland, the creatures inside it safe, for now, from the water's rising edges. He can feel the rest of the world gasp for air, can feel every inch that drowns and soaks from the rain and the ocean.

He pushes himself from the throne, the water now high enough to reach his waist. He pulls his clothes back into place, and kneels down, finding the shaft of his spear and the handle of the god-killing blade. He wraps the blade at his waist, and sets the end of the spear in the sand.

He looks up. "I'm sorry," he says.

Hannibal's head tilts.

"You said you would not touch me, that they would scent you on me and know I was bound to you," Will explains, pressing his lips together. "My actions, my deeds done in your name, drove you to temporary madness."

"You need not kill to bring me to madness, my beautiful ocean-eyed boy," Hannibal says with a ravenous smile. "Your existence does that all on its own."

Will flushes, shivering with pleasure. Above them, the clouds have calmed, the rain grows lighter and more like mist. A fog rolls in from the ocean, and it will obscure his trespass when he makes his way to the land of the wolf and the horse and all other plain-dwelling animals.

Hannibal hums, and lowers his muzzle, nudging Will's cheek until Will kisses him. "I will be with you," he vows. "In the mist and the rain and the wetness of the earth." He sighs. "I know you will not fail, but if you need me, I am yours to summon."

Although Will knows this, and has felt the truth of it for quite some time, it makes him tremble with love and adoration, to hear Hannibal say it.

The mist kisses his bare shoulders, curls in his hair and slicks it to his face and neck. He closes his eyes, still able to taste his god on his tongue, and kisses Hannibal one more time, hands flat on his broad cheeks as Hannibal licks into his mouth to share the taste.

"Go, my love," Hannibal commands, and lifts to his hindlegs, gripping his throne, ready to bring it back to its rightful place in the ocean. Will smiles, and does not move from his place until Hannibal has disappeared into the water, and he cannot see the glint of his eyes nor his throne any longer.

The mare's altar is set in the middle of a wide pasture, lacking fences but with clear white boundaries stretching as far as mortal sight. Six wild boars guard her altar – clearly, she expected him to come. Will's mouth waters at the sight of so much meat; he could feast for *years* on that much flesh, and imagines, for a moment, countless nights of salted pork and all the weapons he could make from the boars' fierce tusks.

He has a new weapon now. He stole one of the fangs of the mighty red dragon, and fashioned it into a sword. He holds it in one hand, his spear in the other. The mist hides him, the heavy rain clouds his scent as he approaches.

He spears the first boar, the animal giving a loud squeal of pain as Will grits his teeth and drives his spear into the heart of it, felling it as quickly as he can. Its brothers notice him, then, and they grunt and rush him all at once. His sword takes out one, a vicious cut along its throat. He yanks his spear out and throws it into the flank of another as it tries to circle him. The boar's flinching yanks it out of his grip, and he snarls, gripping his sword and taking out his god-killing blade.

One of the boars lunges for him and Will winces when its tusk spears his side. But he is not mortal – there is no blood in him to fear losing, no organs to rip and maim. He is iron and silver and has the power of the ocean inside him.

He digs the tip of the god-killing blade into the boar's eyes, blinding it, and finishes it off with his sword. He climbs onto the beast's flank, finds his spear sticking out of the last one it felled. He jumps, wrenching it from the animal's steaming pelt, turns and kneels as another boar lunges at him, spearing itself on his god's tooth.

The last one flees as Will guts its brother, steaming organs and slick blood spilling out onto his hands. He rises, panting, and wipes his bloody hand over his forehead. He hauls each carcass one by one against the mare's altar, pours some of the dragon's black pitch onto their bodies and lights it to create a bonfire.

He sets the pitch in a ring around the altar, smiles as a thick, black cloud rises from the mare's fallen loyal beasts, and settles down to wait for her to arrive.

She does not keep him waiting long. He feels her, in the whisper of the sodden grass and the sudden chill of her wrath as it envelops him. He turns his head, sees the shape of something large and skeletal in the smoke-thickened mist.

"My Lady," he calls to her. "Have you come to kill me?"

She hisses, rage dripping in the noise. He can see the gleam of firelight on her black fur, her hooves shining as though silver. She is only part horse – the shape of a human woman melts from her chest, clad in knight's garb to conceal her nakedness. Her hair, a dark earthy brown, is pulled up into a tight bun. Her eyes shine as though lit with starlight.

"Who are you?" she demands. The mist hides her true location, voice echoing from every direction at once. "Who are you, to come here and kill my friends, and my mate, and sit here on my altar like it is your own?"

Will smiles. "I am the servant of the one true god," he tells her. "His name is Hannibal."

She laughs, scornful and shrill. "You are a foolish, arrogant little boy," she says.

Will hums, and pushes himself to his feet. He does not doubt she has a weapon, nor hoards of animals to send to attack him, to tire him out until he cannot stand. But Will is not mortal, not anymore, and he knows and understands gods.

He takes out his god-killing blade, and kneels upon her altar. With the tip of it, he scratches a line into the wood, which is so soft and wet it parts easily because of Hannibal's rain.

She stiffens, and stops her pacing. "What are you doing?" she demands.

"There is more than one way to kill a god," Will tells her calmly. He finishes carving the first letter, a 'W', and begins on the 'I'. "Do you feel it already, my Lady? Do you feel the power in you flowing to me?"

Before he can start the second 'L', she lets out a wild, high-pitched scream of anger, and emerges into the firelight. She is beautiful, just as her mate was, in the same way art and statues are. Her full lips are twisted into a wrathful snarl, her bright eyes gleaming with rage. She has a sword in her hand, and gallops to him, raises it to strike him down.

Will answers it with his own sword, grunting with effort, for she is strong and the blow was fierce. She reaches for him with her free hand and grips his throat, hauling him from the altar and throwing him to the ground. She rears up, set to dash her hooves against his skull, and Will growls and rolls away from her, quickly to his feet.

She strikes at him again, and her last boar has returned, splitting Will's attention between her sword and the animal's tusks. Will presses his lips together, shivers at the cold brush of mist on him, the squelch of water seeping into his boots. He will not call for his master, not until he has to. This is his quest, after all. This is his design.

The boar lunges at him, for it is just a dumb animal and does not understand strategy. Will blinds it like he did its brother, grips its thick pelt and grunts as he shoves his sword through one eye and out the other. It screams, shaking him off, and he hauls himself onto its back, drawing his sword free. It tries to buck him off, squealing and crying in pain, and Will grits his teeth, digs in his heels, rips at its ear to get it to turn as it runs blindly forward.

The mare's eyes widen, and she rears up with a cry of alarm as Will goes crashing into her. The boar's tusks split the belly of her equine half while Will swipes his sword in a wide arc, the dragon's fang with its coating of pitch slicing through her armor. He does not penetrate her, but sheds blood, poisoning her human half.

He jumps from the boar as it falls beneath her, legs tangled up with hers, and while she is grunting and stumbling away, he runs to the altar and takes up a burning piece of hide. He throws it at her, and it catches with the rest of the dragon's pitch. A flame leaps up, and the mist suddenly disappears, the air so dry for only a brief moment, but enough that it catches on her hair and her human skin, and the air becomes thick with the scent of roasting flesh.

She screams, and Will smiles, climbs upon the altar, and finishes carving his name upon it.

Her scream grows louder, higher in pitch, for now, without her altar in her name, it goes to Will to absorb her power. She lets out a wild wail, frantically pulling at her armor until it falls, revealing flesh that is black and red and blistering.

The smoke chokes her lungs, the ground is so wet she cannot find stable footing. Will bends down and takes up his spear.

"No!" she gasps, collapsing to the ground. Her animal legs twitch and quiver, and she drops her sword and lifts her hands in surrender. "Please! I can give you anything. Anything you desire."

Will pauses, tilts his head. Arches a brow. "Anything?" he echoes.

"Yes," she says, nodding frantically. The burns are starting to take a hold of her, traveling up to her throat, blackening her stomach and her breasts and shoulders. He watches it spread, like poison in her veins, as though her skin is made of water and he can see right through it. It's rather beautiful, he thinks, and wonders if Hannibal can see his venom whenever he pierces Will in the same way.

"I can give you children," she says. Will blinks at her, brow furrowing. "It is in my power. I can put a mother's vessel inside you, so when you lay with your god you can bear his children." It's getting harder for her to breathe, he can see it. She doesn't have long, if Will chooses to keep his name upon her altar and keeps her power for himself. "I can give you land, and all the food you could eat, and all the comforts of a warm hearth. Spare me, and it's yours."

Will swallows. Her offer is tempting, and while Will hates himself for being tempted, he cannot deny that she is offering him exactly what he wants. The one thing that aches inside him with its impossibility – to be so full of his god that he bears fruit from it. To give every inch of his body to Hannibal's legacy, power, and love.

Around him, he feels the mist grow thick, hears a curious rumble in the air.

The moment of weakness is forgotten, pushed down with such savage force it feels like bile. "If you can do it, so can he," he spits, overly angry, at himself for wishing it was so, at her for tempting him, at himself again, for his hesitation. He lifts his spear and drives it right through her heart, watches her choke and whimper, clutching at the blade.

She dies quickly, and when it is done, Will hauls her body onto the altar with the last of her boars and lights the whole fucking thing on fire. He spits on the flames, feeling the mist return to him.

Within it, another rumble. "She tempted you more than the last," Hannibal whispers. His voice is light, curious. The same way he blinked at Will upon their first meeting and whispered with something like awe that Will had the ocean in his eyes.

Will closes his eyes, shuts his gaze off, turns his face away. "Not enough," he hisses.

A tendril of smoke curls around his belly and Will flinches, tensing, flattens his palm against it. Hannibal hums, the sound vibrating inside his skull and making his teeth ache.

"It seems there is something we must discuss," he muses, and Will swallows, but feels Hannibal's touch withdraw. "After the wolf. When it is done, return to me, my love, and I will give you every reward in the world for what you given."

Will wets his lips, and says, "I am perfectly content."

Hannibal's laughter makes the emptiness inside him throb. "Go, my dear boy. There is still work to be done."

Will nods, swallowing. He takes up his blade, his sword, and his spear, scrapes his name off the mare's altar, and leaves the pyre to burn to ashes, to spread, and eventually be devoured by Hannibal's unceasing rain.

Chapter 4

There is such burning, unending pain. The lick of the mist and the cling of cold fog does nothing to stymie the fever in his blood that is blinding the backs of his eyes. There is blood, so much blood, awash in a field of mutilated bodies he writhes and paws at his own hair, rips at his neck, presses his forehead to the ground and *howls*.

The light breeze tries to soothe him, a gentle whisper of '*My child, my love, why do you weep?*' that falls on ears too shrilly ringing to hear them. His back has been torn open, revealing his spine in a way he has only felt once, spread on his god's altar and given over to ascension. His stomach has been ripped by a savage set of claws, and while he is empty and barren and has nothing to lose there is an animal, fierce, horrified cry stuck in his throat at how much it hurts. He holds the flaps of his skin in a tight grip like he might bunch his knuckles around clothing and sobs into the grass.

The wolf had been strong. So strong, his friends and children in their multitudes. There is more pelt than grass on the ground. Snatches of thick, soft fur cling beneath his nails, there are organs in his teeth and coating his throat like poison.

He screams because he can't stop, it began as a bubble in his throat when the first wound was dealt and has not stopped. In front of him, the mighty black wolf with his red, red eyes is panting, not quite dead yet, no, but there's blood on his nose and dripping from his jaws that did not come from Will. The dragon's tooth is embedded in his flank, and Will has lost his spear into the belly of the wolf's mate. She was just as large, a fierce she-wolf.

The wolf's ears are back, teeth bared. He steps unsteadily to one side, wary of Will's blade, the golden gleam of it in the shadowed sun. His eyes, narrow near his wrinkled muzzle, never stray from it. Will grits his teeth, tries to push himself to his feet, makes it to one knee and cries out as he has to let go of his stomach to catch his balance, and more blood pours from him as fresh as a newly opened artery. He cannot fathom where it's all coming from, but his skin is pale and he's dizzy with fever.

The wolf's tail swishes like an agitated cat, he takes another pace and Will turns, unwilling to break line of sight. He stumbles forward and away, using the body of the wolf's mate for cover. She's still warm, and he wraps his fingers in her thick, bloodied fur, gasping for breath and trying to keep himself from bleeding out, but his hand is so slick, his skin no thicker than air. He can't find his grip again.

The wolf steps around, snarling at him, and Will can't even lift his blade to give a deterring jab. He collapses, panting towards the sky, lashes low to shield his eyes from the sun. The wolf's snarl gentles, and his ears swivel forward, sensing that Will is losing the last of his strength.

"You are far from the sea," he comments.

Will laughs. It brings tears to his eyes and his body convulses in the first of what he's sure will be many death throes. His bones are iron, muscles silver, but even metal melts and rusts

eventually.

"I'm so tired," he confesses. And he is. Hunting the wolf had been no small feat – it has been near to a month since he saw Hannibal last, at the altar of the mare. He has felt his god in the touch of the mist and the gentle rainfall that comes with the moon, but he is too far from the ocean for Hannibal to approach him. And with how they left things, well, it seems Hannibal is capable of giving him space after all.

He feels so weak. So *mortal*. The bitterness of it stings the inside of his mouth, or maybe that's what's left of his saliva and his blood. He stops trying to hold his stomach together and rests his hand over his heart, feels that it has gone so slow it's almost still.

The wolf gives a soft rumble. "I am sorry," he says, and he sounds sincere. The wolf's people are the friends of Will's tribe. They will be so angry with him for killing their god. They might seek vengeance on Will's tribe, his father. He can only hope, pray, that when he is gone Hannibal does not let them fall. He has the power of four gods now, perhaps he can tolerate the wolf. Maybe Will has done enough to appease him, to earn his pride and his love even if he will no longer be around to feel the effects of it.

Will manages a smile, turns his face away from the sun. "I'm sorry too," he breathes. He rubs his cheek against the flank of the wolf's fallen mate. His spear is still there, protruding from her belly. She looks rounded, perhaps she was pregnant. Will aches, hollow on the inside. "She was beautiful. I'm so sorry."

There's another scream trapped behind his collarbones, sitting at the base of his skull like a hard rock. He sighs as the wolf steps closer. "She's still warm."

The wolf's ears flatten in anger again, his upper lip curls back. He will devour Will, likely whole. It will hurt. His last moments on this earth will be so, so painful.

Will. Hannibal's voice sounds so far away, frantic, a hushed whisper. *Will. Beloved, please.*

He wishes he could have seen Hannibal one last time.

"Here," the wolf murmurs, stepping over his limp legs. He leans down and nudges Will onto his side, pressed up tight between his fallen mate's hindlegs, where she is still so warm and slick with blood. "Be at peace, little pup. I am not blinded to your journey here, and I am not offended by your arrogance, nor will I ignore your show of strength. You have earned a hunter's death."

Will swallows, and his hands fall away from him. His fingers release the god-killing blade and it tumbles onto the red grass. The wolf presses closer, a soothing purr rumbling in his chest, and parts his jaws to lick at Will's clawed-open shoulder.

Will closes his eyes, trembling. The wolf is so warm, it feels like fire on his frozen skin. Tears cloud his vision, stain his face. He failed. Perhaps he was always destined to fail – his father had been right. He cannot possibly have imagined he would succeed in killing *all* the gods. He's small and frail and mortal; he's a lamb, a boy, a pup. He's nothing.

Will, Hannibal roars again, but he sounds so far away. Will can feel his helpless anger, feel his rage.

Feels, suddenly, the earth tremble and the skies echo an angry snarl. A surge of strength greets him, he gasps, eyes flying open. The wolf's teeth are around his shoulder. There's blood, there's so much blood. He feels it fresh, an open wave dripping onto the stone of his altar. Sees, in a sudden flash, Hannibal tearing at the teeth marks Will himself laid on his arm and pouring himself onto the altar while the rest of his tribe watch in horrified awe. The blood pools in the crevices he clawed, coloring the etching of his own name.

He reaches for the god-killing blade, grits his teeth, and shoves it under the wolf's foreleg, piercing the tender skin behind the joint, and up, into his heart. The wolf howls in pain, jerking back and taking a chunk of Will's flesh with him, and Will grips the blade tight, doesn't let himself lose it. He yanks on the blade and rips the wolf open all the way across his chest, baring his ribs, his lungs.

He reaches into the cut and curls his fingers around the wolf's heart. Yanks it free. The wolf collapses next to Will and his mate, dead before he hits the ground, and Will grunts in pain as the animal's heavy skull lands hard on his knee and snaps his lower leg in one clean break.

He bites into the wolf's heart, because he is hollow and hungry and if he is to die, it will be as a victor. The sky purrs for him, the wind shrieks with raucous laughter. Will closes his eyes, turns his face into the soft belly of the wolf's mate, and surrenders to the darkness.

He wakes freezing cold, shivering, soaked with rain. *My love*, Hannibal whispers to him, calls to him as a distant echo. *My beloved boy. Will. Come home to me.*

Will whimpers, tilts his head back, opens his mouth to drink down his god's rain. "I'm so tired," he breathes. He just wants to sleep. He is used to Hannibal's relentless, persistent love, but he's so tired. Surely another moment, another few minutes, just a little longer, Hannibal, please....

Come back to me, Hannibal commands him.

Will moans, weakly. He's so tired.

Soft as a whisper; *Don't leave me here alone.*

His heart clenches, suddenly, so fiercely spasming it robs him of air. Will cannot disobey his god, and every inch of him *hurts* at the pain in Hannibal's voice. He has to get home. He *must*. He pushes himself up with a groan, plants his foot on the wolf's cheek and shoves his great head off Will's leg, which is now almost black with bruising, swollen around the fracture. He grits his teeth and yanks the spear from the she-wolf's body.

He uses it as a staff, pushing himself to his feet. He takes his sword and his blade and holds them weakly in his free hand. It's almost impossible to walk, but he tries. He has to try. The ocean is calling him home.

He walks until he cannot walk. Crawls, until his wounded stomach aches with every movement, until his head feels so heavy, weighted and drawn to the earth. He has no lungs, and yet they burn with phantom pain, drawing in air like he's eating sand. He crawls until he cannot crawl and then pushes himself along his belly like a snake.

For hours, days, he stumbles and crawls and forces himself forward. Until, delirious and feverish and so thirsty his skin splits with the need for water, he reaches a small rise. Until, there, is a tiny glimpse of an estuary below. There is a river, feeding into the ocean, and within the small expanse of water, he sees the beginning of a whirlpool. Sees, though perhaps it's just fever making him mad, the glow of two purple eyes watching him.

He closes his eyes, and shoves himself over the edge of the cliff, tumbling down into murky, salty water. His shoulder snaps against the rocks, his hip is crushed. He wounds himself on the savage curl of the dragon's tooth.

And then his body hits the water, and the darkness swallows him once again.

Will awakes in a haze, a soft moan torn from him at the feeling of gentle hands. His shoulder is once again whole, his hip feels that particular kind of numb like a cold limb meeting heat. He is clean, resting on his nest of silks. It takes a moment for his vision to sharpen, and then there is Hannibal, human in shape and divine and shining from the light of his ever-burning hearth.

There is a savage-looking bite wound on his arm where he ripped himself open and gave Will the strength to stay alive. There is a large black stone in his hands, ovular, egg-like. Will whimpers, drawing Hannibal's attention, but he doesn't stop as he tenderly pushes apart Will's stomach and eases the egg inside him. He paws at Hannibal's hands, frantic, not understanding. "Hannibal," he whines, as the egg sinks into his bloody and open belly, and Hannibal's hands both inside him, bulging his stomach. "What are you doing?"

"Hush, my love," Hannibal whispers. He leans over Will and kisses his slack mouth. He is shaking, perhaps just as badly as Will is, and cups his face with a blood-slick hand, his eyes shining a brilliant gold with joy and relief. For Will is his most beloved treasure, he has said it himself, and the head of his riches is always so happy to see him. "It won't hurt, I promise."

"Hannibal."

"I have to seed it, darling. Will you allow me?"

The concept of 'allowing' Hannibal to do anything is as foreign as warmth feels to him now. The pressure of the ocean encompasses him, and Will closes his eyes, weeping openly; he's

finally home. Hannibal is here and that means he made it back. It would be a great honor, the perfect gift, to feel Hannibal inside him one last time.

"Yes," he whispers.

Hannibal smiles, kisses him again, and pushes Will's limp legs apart, lifts his hips just enough on silk pillows to allow Hannibal to penetrate. There is venom on his tongue and Will shakes at the familiar surge of ecstasy, panting and pawing at Hannibal's hair, his nape. They are pressed so close Will feels the bulge of the egg rip at his belly, press against Hannibal's.

"My Will," Hannibal purrs to him, in a voice so gentle and thick with adoration that Will's body spasms, desire and hunger and pain sending him to the heights only his god can achieve. At the bottom of the ocean, Will flies. He kisses Hannibal with tears on his tongue and can only lie there, limp and unmoving, as his god fills him with his cock, pets his thighs and his hips and every inch of his pale skin. "My beautiful boy. How much I adore you, darling; there are no words. You are perfect. You have done so much for me. I will give you everything, my love, everything you could possibly ask for. Everything you have not asked me for and yet desire."

It takes a moment for Hannibal's words to catch up with him. Will gasps, opening his eyes, stares up through his tears into Hannibal's loving gaze. He bites his lower lip, presses a hand to his torn-open stomach, which is slowly knitting itself together around the egg.

"Is this...?"

Hannibal smiles at him. "A god must be born like any other creature," he purrs, and kisses Will's breathless mouth. "I went to her island and upon her altar, I found her. I will plant her in you, and seed her like any creature, and you will grow her inside you and bear her into the world." Will swallows, eyes wide. "I will make you a mother, Will."

Will moans weakly, and comes from the words alone. He falls back into darkness before Hannibal finishes, but that has never stopped them before, and it doesn't now. The rocking of Hannibal inside him is like the call of the ocean, and he is home. Finally, he is home.

Hannibal is as relentless with this as he is with everything else. For the next week, Will cannot breathe without Hannibal inside him, planting wave after wave of his seed around the egg to ensure it catches. He pets Will's stomach, which has a small bulge from the size of the egg. He brings Will feasts, bountiful harvest from the ocean and the land, since he is now lord of all of it. Will cannot go a moment without hearing Hannibal declare his love, his fierce desire for Will echoed threefold in his head and never waning.

Will heals, because his god is gentle and kind and so devoted to him. He returns to his state of red-cheeked flush and dripping wet body. He remembers the taste of Hannibal's come in his mouth. He welcomes his master home from every trip to the surface with a warm smile and spread thighs.

Hannibal brings him the wolf's head, the mare's armor, and silks from the scorpion queen's nest. The dragon's tooth Will made into a sword hangs with his spear and his god-killing blade above Hannibal's hearth, the wolf's head becomes his perch. He hammers out the mare's armor until it can fit his own body perfectly, though he has no need to wear it, and he polishes it to a brilliant, glimmering shine like a mirror.

He rides Hannibal on his throne, staring at his trophies while his belly swells with the life Hannibal gifted him. He no longer is empty, no longer hollow; he is a perfect vessel for his god's designs, open and wet and wanting. He calls Hannibal to his nest whenever desire strikes him, and that is often, and his god is as adoring and passionate as he has always been.

When it is time, he reopens Will's stomach and removes the egg, and it is much larger now, the size of Will's skull twice over. He moans with loss when it's removed, but understands it was her time to go. Hannibal smiles at him, kisses him long and sweet, and places the egg within his fire so she will stay warm.

"What was her name?" Will asks, sprawled on the scorpion queen's silk and petting absently over the wolf's muzzle.

Beside him, Hannibal sighs, and strokes the scar on Will's stomach. "Mischa," he replies.

"Will she claim that name again?"

"I believe so," Hannibal says. "She was very fond of it."

Will smiles. "She was a bird?"

"She had wings, and resembled a harpy most," Hannibal tells him, voice gentle and soft with affection. "A human face and torso. Feathers black as night." Will smiles, humming as Hannibal lays a tender kiss to his wild hair. "She and I were seeded by the same god."

"And now you are her father," Will says, and laughs at the insanity of the world.

"And you, her mother," Hannibal purrs. Will shivers, thighs tensing, his stomach clenching around its own emptiness. "And I know she will love and adore you as I do." He pauses, and then adds; "Her siblings, too."

Will's eyes widen, and he rolls onto his back so he can meet Hannibal's purple-threaded eyes. Power, there is so much power in him now, Will feels it like a second skin. Like armor. He is the consort of the one true god, the one who gave him all his riches and power and wrath. Hannibal's father is no longer of this world; he belonged to generations before, and died when his children came of age. Or perhaps he is somewhere far away with a love of his own, content in his retirement, and smiles upon his only son and thinks his work is good.

"Siblings?" Will echoes.

Hannibal's eyes shine, and his smile is wide. "Do you only wish to become a mother once?" he purrs. "I can do it again."

"Would I birth titans?"

"Demigods, titans, creatures that fit neither name," Hannibal says. "Creatures like you. There is nothing that you are like, not in all my vast years have I seen anything your equal. Our union, my beloved, darling boy, is like none other."

Will smiles. "When we first met, I told you I was named for you," he murmurs. Hannibal's head tilts, and he nods. "Your will be done. I am yours. I have always been yours – command me bear your legacy and it is already done."

Hannibal's eyes flash, a brilliant smile showing all of his teeth. "I think it is truer to say the opposite, darling; command me fill you, ask of me the moon and the stars and every drop of water in existence, and it is yours."

Will's lashes lower, he bites his lip and cards his fingers through Hannibal's fine hair. "Yes," he breathes, and it takes just a small movement for Hannibal to rise, to push himself between Will's thighs, to lower himself so every inch of them is touching as Will wraps his legs around Hannibal's waist. Hannibal kisses him, swallows his plaintive, eager moan, and pushes into him so deep Will tastes him on his tongue.

On the next full moon, heavy with his next child and brilliant with starlight, Will brings their child back to her altar on the island and Hannibal sits with him, watching her hatch. She is beautiful, her feathers fluffy and black, her eyes shining and the same blue as Will's.

Will weeps openly with happiness, as Hannibal purrs and nuzzles their daughter with a gentle touch, and as he hears her chirp and cry and she takes meat from his hand, Will feels the world tremble, and knows that it has been reborn.

The new world has arisen from the depths of the ocean, and Will stands with his god on the very edge of it, and cannot wait to see what it brings.

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